

Partition and Nationhood in Khuswanth Singh and Amitav Ghosh's Select Works

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Abstract: This present study portrays the Partition and Nationhood in the Novels of in Indian English Khuswanth Singh and Amitav Ghosh. The partition of India and agony of the people became the theme of Indian English literature. The novels of partition deal with communal violence and miserable migration of people across the newly created national borders. The nation went through a curtail crises of evolution and identity. The paper attempts to read the novels of the writers like Kuswanth Singh, Amitav Ghosh, focussing on their views on partition and the problem of nationhood in a postcolonial perspective.

Keywords: Partition, Nationhood, Evolution, Postcolonial, Violence

English language came to India as the language of the colonizer. The British rule promoted English language and its learning. Western civilization and culture were introduced to colonial India through English education which resulted in producing an elite group which admired the west and wanted to be like English men. This produced an era of cultural and political renaissance and reformation, growing confrontation between the colonizers and colonized. The educated Indian youth began to question Indian traditions and absorb liberal values and democratic principles that they became familiar with. Science and industry along with western literature especially those of English people became the symbols of civilization in colonial India in contrast to the traditional knowledge systems and languages. This chapter attempts to read the national and transnational discourse developed in the literature produced in English by writers of India during the colonial period and after. The focus is on the writers of Indian English fiction who are more or less contemporaneous to Amitav Ghosh.

Indian writing in English has a history that starts during the colonial period and progresses through decolonization, nationalism and transnationalism. It is postcolonial in the sense that it depicts the several aspects of colonization and decolonization, and involves many issues including colonial oppression, resistance movements, nationalism, gender issues, hybridity, partition and so on.

The Indian postcolonial writers in English tried to break away from imitating the western colonial writings. However it was a challenge to express in an alien language the social and cultural peculiarities of one's own. Hence the Indian writers in English employed English language in diverse ways to embody different cultural experiences. They were able to explore Indian sentiments, rites and rituals, family and society in English language. The creativity of Indian writers in English nativized and acculturated the English language to a great extent and contributed to the plurality of Indian English literature. According to Salman Rushdie English language has ceased to be the sole possession of the English. He remarks

What seem to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it- assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers. (Rushdie 1991:64)

Indian English Writing in the Colonial Period

The rise of Indian English writing was caused by the English education introduced by the British and its influence in the creative minds of the Indian middle class. The early writers began to take up the issues like tradition and modernity and the need for changes in the society. The thoughts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other reformers who upheld liberalism and rationalism inspired the writers to open their eyes to the fact that their motherland is suffering under the colonial oppression. The emergence of Indo-Anglican novel reflects the national aspiration for freedom and resistance against colonial rule. The advent of Mahatma Gandhi brought about a new phase in the national freedom movement that went down deeply into the consciousness of Indian masses with the ideals of non-violence, social justice, self determination and democratic principles. The freedom movements fought against the foreign rule and wanted to end casteism, illiteracy, and other social evils also. The novels both in Indian vernaculars and Indian English tried to reflect the realities of the exploited and under privileged Indian common people. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee Indo-Anglian fiction began as the historical novel and then developed into the themes of social reform and political change during the colonial period. (Mukherjee 1971:27) The era of national movement produced K.S Venkataramani's *Murugan, the Tiller* (1929) and *Kandan, the patriot* (1932) which are full of Gandhian thoughts and ideals of Satyagraha. Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable* published in 1935 was the earliest attempt to deal with the lives of the depressed classes not only in Indian English literature but in modern Indian literature in general. (Naik and Narayan 2007:250). The Indian English writers represented a pan-Indian sensibility and as they wrote in a world language, they could win recognition for Indian Nationalism and Indian English Literature among educated Indians and readers abroad (251). Writers like R K Narayan and Raja Rao were rooted in their local cultures and responded to the ideology of Gandhian non-violence and its effects in the Indian villages.

Kanthapura(1938) of Raja Rao is considered as a novel that subverts the colonizers view of India and by mixing myth and history contributes to the phenomenon of the nation building. R K Narayans *Waiting for The Mahathma*(1955)portrays the condition of Gandhian politics after independence that the new Indian ruling class who show off themselves as Gandhians in fact rejected the principles of the Mahathma. *The Men Who Killed Gandhi* (1978) a novel written by Manohar Malgonkar narrates with precision the events that led to the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. In this manner Indian English literature from its beginnings itself was postcolonial, standing for nation and the nation formation on new values rejecting the colonial.

Partition Novels

As we have seen earlier the British wanted to divide Indians and instigated them to fight one another thus facilitating the interests of British imperialism. This policy reached its culmination when India attained independence after partition into two big states Hindustan and Pakistan. This was done on the basis of religion-muslim majority areas were artificially and forcibly termed as state of Pakistan and the Hindu and Sikh majority areas were categorized as Hindustan.

The British departed from India after creating a nation within a nation, which greatly affected the Muslim majority of Punjab and Bengal when these provinces were divided into West Punjab and East Bengal. This eventually led to the formation of two Pakistans. Millions of Hindus left their native places which were now marked as Pakistan and migrated to the places which were named as Hindustan. Muslims in the Hindu majority area fled to the places counted as Pakistan. These popular movements were unprecedented in the history of India and it was followed by riots, bloodshed, rapes, robbery and the endless sufferings of common people who were running for their life. The dream of a united and peaceful nation of the Mahatma was crushed.

Partition of India and the agony of the people became the theme of literatures in India. Many works were written in Indian English literature on this theme which was termed as partition literature. The novels of partition chiefly deal with the unaccountable number of violence and the miserable migration of the innocent victims. These novels show how the peace of the Indian sub continent had been totally hampered by the communal riots and subsequent wars between Hindus and Muslims.

Thus the tragedy of partition paved way for the emergence of a peculiar type of literature which could be called Partition literature which include poems, fiction and plays. English, Hindi and Urdu and Bengali were the strongest reflecting mirrors of the tragedy of partition. In *Train to Pakistan* the novel by Khuswanth Singh the communal riots caused by partition is described thus:

Muslim said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and spread and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped... By the summer of 1947, when the creation of the new state of Pakistan was formally announced, ten millions people- Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs-were in flight. By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms. (Singh 1989:1-2)

The first generation partition novels written in India are *The Distant Drum* (1960) *A Bend in the Ganges*(1964) written by Manohar Malgonkar. Balachandra Rajan wrote *The Dark Dancer* (1955) and Attia Hussain authored *The Sun Light on the Broken Colum* (1961). In 1965 Sadat Hasan Manto wrote short stories about *The Pangs of Partition*. These novels were followed by the works of Bhima Sahini and later Salman Rushdie who formed the second current of partition novels. Partition continued to harass the Indian novelists and *Shame*(1983) by Rushdie, *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Siddwa and *The Shadow Lines*(1988) by Amitav Ghosh followed .

Mukul Keshwan produced in 1995 the novel *Looking Through the Glass* with the theme of partition. In Siddwa's novel communal riots and violence are described through the eyes of an innocent girl who is eight year old. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*(1975) deals about the psychological effects of the partition. The massacre of thousands of innocent people and the trauma suffered by the survivors are the main theme of his fiction. These novels clearly show the destructive or negative side of nationalism and the terrors of rigid communalism.

The partition novels emanate from a particular historical context and presents the nation going through a crucial crisis of evolution and identity. The survival of the nation and its people were under threat because of the greedy politics of bureaucrats and anti- social elements who were encouraged by the colonial policy to break India. The decision to divide India was taken in a haste by the colonialists and the so called national leaders. Before the people could understand the political and social implications of the partition of the motherland they were pushed into unending violence in which hundreds of people were killed and butchered and raped on either side of the border. Those who survived the tragedy remembered the traumatic experience for years and suffered till their death. The Independence of the country and its organization as a new nation state brought humiliation and suffering, violation of human dignity and rootlessness.

Train To Pakistan portrays how the harmony of life in the villages inhabited by Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs was destroyed. In the novel Khuswanth Singh shows a ray of hope for the continuation of human values and love amidst the brutality and cruelty of religious clashes. A good district commissioner saves the Muslim

refugees travelling to Pakistan by a train to Pakistan with the help of Budmash Jugga who was released from jail. Jugga when he knew that his beloved Nooran was also a passenger of the same train cuts the thick rope tied by the Hindu and Sikh rioters across the railway bridge and saves the lives of all travelers but in that attempt he sacrifices his life. The trauma of partition along the western border is portrayed by Kushwanth Singh In *The Train to Pakistan*. Amitav Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* recollects the sufferings of the people on the eastern side. As rightly observed by Mosarraf Hossain

The Shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh focuses on the partition of India and the consequent trauma of the east Bengal Psyche. In the post-partitioned India the trauma of partition continues through three generations. The agonies of displacement, the sense of alienation in the adopted land and the constant dream of return to one's land- these are the common themes in both the novels "Train to Pakistan" and the *Shadow Lines*. (Hossain 2012:2)

The Indian English novel reflected in the national aspiration for freedom and resistance against colonial rule. Indo Anglican fiction started as a historical novel and then develops into social reform and political change during the colonial period. When the British departed India dividing the country. The partition of India and agony of the people became the theme of Indian English literature. The novels of partition deal with communal violence and miserable migration of people across the newly created national borders. The nation went through a curtail crises of evolution and identity. The paper attempts to read the novels of the writers like Kushwanth Singh, Amitav Ghosh, focussing on their views on partition and the problem of nationhood in a postcolonial perspective.

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